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During a summer spent campaigning, U.S. Rep. John Adler talked about wanting to help shore up the nation's financial systems and improve services for American soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Less than a month into his first term in Congress, Adler, D-3rd of Cherry Hill, appears to be well-positioned to address both issues from his seats in the House Financial Services and Veterans' Affairs committees.

Adler was appointed to the Financial Services Committee on Jan. 5, the same day he was sworn into office, and the Veterans' Affairs Committee last week.

Financial Services provides oversight on matters of real estate, banking, insurance, securities and public and assisted housing, while the Veterans' Affairs committee oversees the billions of dollars provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Freshman congressmen are restricted from serving on no more than two committees. Getting on the right committees is crucial because most of a congressman's influence is limited to the committees on which he or she serves.

"Getting on the right committee is almost a life-or-death matter for a new congressman," said Rutgers University political science professor Ross Baker.

And while political watchers such as Baker agree that Financial Services and Veterans' Affairs are good fits for Adler, a longtime state lawmaker who won the right to replace the retiring Republican Jim Saxton of Mount Holly, some in Adler's district worry that those appointments came at the expense of a seat on the House Armed Services Committee.

Saxton was a longtime member of Armed Services, which is responsible for funding and oversight of the Department of Defense and U.S. armed forces, as well as much of the Department of Energy. Saxton and his many supporters frequently have credited his position on the committee with helping him secure missions and resources for the military installations Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base and Lakehurst Naval Air Station as well as various defense contractors in the 3rd Congressional District.

Fort Dix, McGuire and defense contractor Lockheed Martin are the biggest employers in Burlington County and maintaining their viability is considered crucial for the county's economy.

"The bases produce so much money for Burlington County, it's unbelievable," said John Aloï, a Republican from Mount Holly, who served on a citizens committee that fought past attempts to close the installations.

New Jersey Congressman Rob Andrews, D-1st of Haddon Heights, and Frank LoBiondo, R-4th of Mays Landing, remain on the Armed Services Committee, but Aloï argued that the 3rd District needs its own representative on the committee as well.

"It's much easier to close a base without a strong congressman on that committee," Aloï said, adding that he was surprised Democratic leadership didn't appoint Adler to the post.

"He seems like a very competent guy," Aloï said. "I just think it's unfortunate that they didn't consider the military bases."

Adler, in an interview last week concerning his appointments, said he believed he still would be able to provide strong representation for the bases and area defense contractors, even without a spot on Armed Services.

"I'm eager to work on every committee there is," Adler said. "Leadership may have limited the number of committees which freshman congressmen can serve on, but that in no way limits my number of interests, and I am confident that I'll be at the bases often and will be working with our defense contractors to achieve our national security and economic interests."

Adler also defended his appointments to Financial Services and Veterans Affairs, arguing that he can make a lasting difference in the lives of his constituents from both committees.

"We know our economy is struggling right now and that most of the causes are financial in nature," Adler said. "To really rebuild our economy, we need to fix our financial system and get money moving to our businesses again."

He said he was particularly interested in making sure that money from the previous Congress' \$750 billion financial rescue package was not misused or hoarded by banks.

On Veterans Affairs, Adler said he wanted to make sure the 21st Century GI Bill, which was approved by Congress earlier this year, is properly implemented. The bill provides increased education benefits to veterans.

"I want to make sure that's implemented in ways that really meet our heroes' needs," he said.

Burlington County Democratic Chairman Rick Perr said he considered Veterans' Affairs and Financial Services key assignments for Adler, particularly because of the ongoing economic crisis facing the country and Burlington County's large population of veterans.

"Congressman John Adler has managed to find himself on some of the most key committees and subcommittees in Congress," Perr said Friday. "For a freshman legislator to be put in this situation is remarkable, and it underscores the type of influence he will have in deciding the direction this country will go in."

Baker said he believed both committee assignments would position Adler well for a re-election campaign in 2010.

"Would it have been better for him to get on Armed Services? Probably, but these are good committees to be on, particularly for a Democrat taking over for a popular Republican predecessor," Baker said.

"For veterans in his district, to have your congressman be able to pick up the phone and call (the head of the Department of Veterans Affairs) is a pretty good thing. Financial Services is

also very desirable because he'll be in the majority party and will be working on the stimulus and economy + Even as a junior congressman, it gives you the opportunity to ask questions and that makes you a player."